Alternative Schooling For Adolescents

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SUMMARY REPORT

of

Two Demonstration Projects in Alternative Schooling for Adolescents

PROJECT REACH
Harry Collinge High School, Hinton
1976-79

and

PROJECT EXPERIENCE
Rocky Mountain House School Division
1975-78

- by -

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1980

FOREWORD

The adolescent who is experiencing difficulty in school, or who finds schooling aversive, presents a pervasive, chronic and perplexing problem to educators. This publication summarizes reports prepared by staff members of two projects which attempted to ameliorate this problem.

Readers will note several similarities between the two projects. Planners for both projects opted to implement remediation programs at locations away from the main school. They decided not to modify programs within the regular school and not to involve regular class teachers in instruction. These decisions reflect the underlying assumptions that the causes reside mainly within the student and not within the school, and that solutions should be sought elsewhere.

Some readers might opt for solutions based on another premise; namely, that many problem areas can be identified with the school and not primarily with the student. Those who subscribe to this premise would consider, instead, modifications to philosophy, organization and teaching in the integrated setting of the regular school. This approach, of course, would place a heavy professional responsibility on the regular teaching staff.

Empirical studies have not justified the segregation of any but a very small percentage of students for remediation programs. In addition, when the results of follow-up studies are considered, there is support for involvement in direct instruction by regular class teachers. Most benefits from remediation seem to "wash out" when the student is re-integrated into the regular program. These follow-up findings demonstrate the importance of the regular teacher's participation in all phases of a student's education. It appears that support is needed for regular class teachers as they assume responsibility for prevention; in the remediation process itself, if necessary; and in accommodating graduates from remediation programs.

Accordingly, support is increasing for involvement of the total staff in accommodating individual differences among students through all stages of the students' school careers. This approach would reduce the need to segregate for instruction except only in extreme cases, and then only for relatively short periods of time. (Documentations about empirical findings are referenced in the review of remedial and compensatory programs for adolescents by W. Hathaway, et al., entitled, Disadvantaged Learners: The Nature of the Problem and Some Potential Solutions).

This writer had opportunities for viewing the projects several times at their off-campus locations. I was impressed by the dedication and commitment exhibited by teachers, aides and the social worker in these challenging endeavours. I also observed, and as documented in their reports, they were successful in effecting changes in students' attitudes and in establishing rapport. The esprit de corps developed was exemplary and this merits a commendation.

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1975 and 1979, the Planning and Research Branch of Alberta Education provided partial funding for two demonstration projects in alternative schooling for students who were not experiencing success in the regular school program. Project REACH (Realistic Educational Alternatives Can Help) was conducted in Hinton and Project Experience was conducted in Rocky Mountain House. Although the two projects were different in a number of ways, they also had several common characteristics. Both projects were located at an off-campus, downtown location. The curriculum for both projects included remedial work in basic academic subject areas, development of social and life skills, and work experience programs. And, both projects were designed for secondary school age students who either did not like school and/or were low achievers or underachievers; and, in most cases, had social and personal problems. Some of the Project REACH students were achieving quite well for their ability levels but were experiencing spotty success because they were deficient in basic skills. All of the Project Experience students were classified as learning disabled since they were grossly underachieving in some aspects of school work.

This report summarizes each project's design, curriculum and evaluation methods; notes the problems encountered; and indicates the successes and failures of each aspect of the program. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are presented for the guidance of school systems who are considering the use of a similar "alternative schooling" approach.

Readers who require further information about these projects should consult the following original reports, which may be borrowed from the Planning and Research Branch, Alberta Education, 9th Floor, Devonian Building, 11160 Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T5K 0L2, or from the Regional Offices of Alberta Education at Grande Prairie, Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary and Lethbridge.

Harry Collinge High School, Hinton, Alberta. Final Evaluation: REACH. Alberta Education, 1979.

Splett, L. A. Project Experience: An Alternative Junior High School Program. Alberta Education, 1979.

The above-mentioned reports provided most of the information contained in this summary. The writer also reviewed related memos, letters and reports filed at Alberta Education and discussed aspects of each project with Dr. H. C. Rhodes, Education Consultant at the Planning and Research Branch of Alberta Education, who was involved with both projects.

PROJECT REACH

(Realistic Educational Alternatives Can Help)

Harry Collinge High School, Hinton, Alberta

1976-79

PROJECT REACH
(Realistic Educational Alternatives Can Help)

OVERVIEW

Project REACH was conducted between February 1, 1976 and February 1, 1979. It was designed to provide alternative schooling for non-academic students in grades 8, 9 and 10 who were not experiencing success in the regular school program at the Harry Collinge High School in Hinton, Alberta. The project provided an alternative, in that:

a) The academic portion of the curriculum consisted of a general education core which integrated reading, language, mathematics and science in order to make these subjects more relevant to real-life situations.

b) Because the program operated out of a downtown building instead of the school, students had more contact with the community and the world of work.

c) Emphasis was placed on a work experience component which utilized local businesses and agencies.

BACKGROUND

In the spring of 1975, after experiencing great difficulty and frustration in attempting to provide for the needs of some of the academically unsuccessful students, two secondary school teachers in Hinton, Mrs. D. McDonald and Mrs. W. Scanlan, decided there was a need for "realistic educational alternatives." They developed a proposal for Project REACH which spelled out objectives, program of studies, criteria for selecting students, evaluation procedures and requirements for implementation (staff, equipment, materials, funding and community resources) and presented it to their principal, who subsequently contacted the local school board and the Minister of Education. After a number of meetings and discussions, the school division announced in December 1975 that a modified version of the original proposal would be implemented on February 1, 1976.

PROJECT DESIGN

1. Objectives and Goals

The general objectives of Project REACH (which are all inter-related) were:

a) To tie the activities of the classroom to those of the community.

b) To provide an intermediate stage of development between school and community living.

c) To initiate the constructive integration of students into society.

d) To prepare students for independent and successful living.

e) To facilitate lifetime employment opportunities for students.

f) To provide students with successful and meaningful experiences.

g) To give students an opportunity to develop self-worth in wider settings than the classroom can provide.

The project also specified the following goals for each of the three levels of the program.

> Level one (grade 8): To develop a positive self-concept, by means of successful experiences with school and learning.
>
> Level two (grade 9): To develop both social and vocational pre-employment skills, by means of short-term tasks done on the school premises and involvement of community resource personnel.
>
> Level three (grade 10): To reinforce positive self-concepts and social and work skills acquired at levels one and two, by means of work experience in the community.

2. Selection of Students

Generally, students selected for the project could be described as underachieving, academic failures who lacked a positive self-concept; in other words, potential dropouts.

Teachers, guidance counsellors and administrative personnel selected students for Project REACH according to these criteria:

a) Intelligence quotient scores in the low average range.

b) Achievement levels two years below expected grade level in two or more core subjects (reading, language, mathematics and science).

c) No severe behavior problems, unless such problems are directly related to learning difficulties.

d) Regular attendance prior to admittance.

e) Written parental consent after an interview in which school personnel explain the project.

It should also be noted that all students participated in the project voluntarily.

Students were placed at one of the three levels described earlier, according to their age, maturity in comparison to their peer group, academic performance and assessed potential in recent grades.

3. Staff, Space and Facilities, Funding

The project had a maximum of 15 students at each level or of 45 students each year. Over the three years a total of 96 students participated. The staff consisted of three teachers and one other person who had the triple role of teachers' aide, secretary and work experience co-ordinator.

Yellowhead School Division rented 3,000 square feet of space in a downtown shopping mall and converted it into two classrooms, industrial education and home economics laboratories, an office, and a teachers' work room.

Funding for Project REACH came from the usual sources--the School Foundation Program and local revenue--supplemented by 1.5 Special Education teaching position grants and a special grant of $51,000 over three years from the Planning and Research Branch of Alberta Education.

The principal of Harry Collinge High School administered the project, and an appointed steering committee monitored and directed the project. The steering committee included representatives from parents, teachers, the Hinton Local Advisory Board, the Yellowhead school board, Alberta Education, and administrators from the Yellowhead school division central office and Hinton schools.

CURRICULUM

The teachers involved in Project REACH developed much of the curriculum themselves, but they also used existing resources such as workbooks. The major curriculum feature, other than the focus on individual progress in basic skills, was a number of mini-modules which integrated various subjects or disciplines into life skill study programs. These mini-modules dealt with topics like consumer education, banking, everyday law, travel, government, family life, conservation and career choice, and were designed to encourage students to acquire knowledge and skills in language, reading, mathematics and science by making them more aware of the need for such learning and capitalizing on their interests.

A second aspect of the curriculum was a heavy emphasis on work-related courses and social skills through the study of industrial arts, home economics, arts and crafts, physical education and outdoor education.

Students in grades 8 and 9 concentrated on academic remediation and pre-employment activities such as building picnic tables on the school premises. Grade 10 students who were 15 or older had work study placements for half of each day. They went to local businesses and agencies, including a bakery, a hardware store, a coffee shop, a florist's, a hairdresser's, a tourist information office and a kindergarten. Other jobs included plumbing, electrical work, meat cutting, office work, mechanics, drywalling and food service.

EVALUATION METHODS

Project REACH was evaluated through several procedures.

a) The following standardized tests were administered to students in January 1977 and re-administered annually in a single-group, pretest/post-test evaluation design:

   i) Stanford Achievement Tests of reading, language and mathematics,

   ii) Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test.

b) Teachers kept individual cumulative files on each student, containing weekly anecdotal records regarding attendance, conduct, social and work skills, maturity, and attitude.

c) Students, teachers and employers completed work experience evaluation forms, and the work experience co-ordinator interviewed employers.

d) A student attitudes survey was used; comparisons were made with similar students in the regular school program and with pre-project attitude levels.

e) Parents responded through questionnaires and interviews.

f) Teachers prepared subjective reports on the project.

g) The high school principal, pupil personnel consultant, assistant superintendent and Alberta Education personnel evaluated the project.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

1. Setting Up the Project

The program began very quickly. In December 1975 Alberta Education agreed to provide the necessary additional funding for the project to begin operation on February 1, 1976. In less than a month the staff completed curriculum development, located a suitable facility, obtained materials, and selected the students. After the project started, teachers were in class full-time and therefore found it difficult to do further long-range program planning. Renovations and delivery of equipment and material remained incomplete for some time.

The work experience component of the project did not actually begin until the fall of 1976 because the co-ordinator needed several months to contact potential employers and make arrangements. Therefore, teachers had to find activities for the grade 10 students to fill the half of each school day which would have been taken up by work experience. Another unanticipated problem was that some of these students were under 15 years of age and therefore ineligible for work experience.

Rapid turnover of staff was a serious problem during the first term. The result was insecurity among students and alteration of program content and methods to suit the abilities and interests of new teachers. Although most of these "growing pains" decreased as the project got under way and became more organized, a larger period of time for preparation and planning would certainly have prevented a number of problems and would have permitted the development of a more efficient and productive program.

2. Facilities

The space that Project REACH was able to find was too small, and equipment and materials were insufficient. The laboratories for industrial education and home economics could not be properly equipped because of expense, and standards of cleanliness and safety were hard to maintain. An inspection done in June 1977 by Alberta Labour revealed that the building violated fire and safety regulations in several ways. The normal school facilities and services such as a library, gymnasium, and laboratories were available to these students but were not used very frequently. A gymnasium at the Forestry School was used more extensively.

3. Selection of Students

Some teachers felt that grade 8 students were too immature for the project--that they were not capable of identifying with the goals of academic upgrading and preparation for employment. For this reason and because of a severe lack of preparation time, teachers requested that the grade 8's be returned to the resource room in the high school. (The time problem continued throughout the project, regardless of the levels included, because the students always needed a great deal of teacher guidance and tutoring).

4. Follow-Up

Perhaps the greatest problem that Project REACH encountered was in deciding how to integrate their students back into the regular school system after grade 10. Some graduates of Project REACH would go directly into the work force, but most did not have sufficient training for employment and/or were too young. Consequently, they had to return to the high school, where some teachers were not prepared to deal with their special needs. In June 1977, concerned parents petitioned Alberta Education and the local school board, asking that Project REACH be extended to include grade 11 students. To alleviate the problem of reintegrating the grade 10's, the administration and steering committee agreed to include grade 11 students as of September 1978.*

5. Communication and Public Relations

The project succeeded in reaching its objective of becoming more involved with the community. The work experience program was well received, and guest speakers from the community agreed to come into the classroom to talk about such topics as first aid, shoplifting, banking, drugs and alcohol, life insurance, police services, and various careers.

Community response was generally positive, but more public relations activities could have eliminated some misunderstandings that some members of the community had about the purposes and methods of the project.

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* Project REACH initially included grades 8 to 10, then grades 9 and 10 for one semester, and grades 8 to 11 during the last year.

EVALUATION RESULTS

Teachers, parents and students were enthusiastic about Project REACH and judged it to be quite successful.

Teachers felt positively about the off-campus site because it removed students from the stigma of being failures in the regular school system and created a personalized, intimate atmosphere which was ideal for nurturing self-confidence and providing individual help. Even setting up the school facilities, which happened unintentionally, turned out to be a good experience which helped the group to become acquainted through sharing common goals. Teachers also liked the freedom to innovate the flexible program and timetable, both of which would be difficult to achieve within a large-school setting.

Interviews and questionnaires indicated that the parents had a consistently positive attitude. They expressed some doubts, however, about whether the physical facilities were adequate, and they were evenly divided about whether or not the program should take place at an off-campus location.

According to observations by parents and teachers and results of student attitude surveys, project students were happy and experiencing a good measure of success.

1. Basic Skill Evaluations

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test and Stanford Achievement Test were administered at regular intervals throughout the program. Results showed that over the three years a majority of the students made consistent gains in Grade Equivalent Scores for reading (speed, accuracy, vocabulary, and comprehension), understanding the meaning of a paragraph, spelling, language, and arithmetic computation, concepts and application. The proportion of students who made some gain was higher in 1977-78 than in 1978-79. The percentage of students who gained more than one grade equivalent was also higher in 1977-78. Further details of these test results appear in Table 1.

2. Assessment of Self-Concept

Students' self-concepts were assessed through teacher observation and parents' responses to the question, "Has your child's self-confidence increased since coming to the REACH Project?" All parents who responded to the questionnaires answered "Yes", both in 1977 and 1979. Administrators and teachers also reported that the students in the project had gained more self-confidence.

3. Attitude Surveys

In January 1977 and February 1979, the REACH students and a comparison group, made up of non-academic students with similar aptitudes who were in the regular school program, completed an attitude survey questionnaire (Figure 1).

Table 1

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS LOSING/GAINING IN SCORES ON STANDARDIZED ACHIEVEMENT TESTS

Test and Subtest	Instruction Interval (N)	Percentage Exhibiting Change				
		Loss	No Change	Gain	Total	>1.0 Years
Gates-MacGinitie	January 1977/January 1978 (N = 34)					
Speed and Accuracy		6	12	82	100	56
Vocabulary		12	12	76	100	44
Comprehension		12	18	70	100	38
	January 1978/January 1979					
Speed and Accuracy		11	11	78	100	44
Vocabulary		11	4	85	100	30
Comprehension		7	22	71	100	19
Stanford Achievement	January 1977/January 1978 (N = 29)					
Paragraph Meaning		7	14	79	100	38
Spelling		10	3	87	100	38
Language		14	24	66	100	17
Arithmetic Computation		3	14	83	100	24
Arithmetic Concepts		14	31	55	100	31
Arithmetic Applications		7	14	79	100	17
	January 1978/January 1979					
Paragraph Meaning		7	11	82	100	26
Spelling		15	7	78	100	26
Language		15	30	55	100	19
Arithmetic Computation		11	15	74	100	30
Arithmetic Concepts		15	37	48	100	4
Arithmetic Applications		15	26	59	100	26

STUDENT ATTITUDE SURVEY

1. I like school ___

   a) always.
   b) usually.
   c) half the time.
   d) sometimes.
   e) never.

2. What I am learning in school is interesting ___

   a) always.
   b) usually.
   c) half the time.
   d) sometimes.
   e) never.

3. What I am learning in school is useful ___

   a) always.
   b) usually.
   c) half the time.
   d) sometimes.
   c) never.

4. I plan to keep going to school ___

   a) as long as I can.
   b) for another year.
   c) until the end of this year.
   d) until I find a job.
   e) until I am allowed to quite.

5. I like ___ of my teachers.

   a) all
   b) most
   c) half
   d) some
   e) none

6. I like ___ of my classmates.

   a) all
   b) most
   c) half
   d) some
   e) none

7. I like school ___

   a) a lot better than 2 years ago.
   b) a little better than 2 years ago.
   c) the same as 2 years ago.
   d) a little less than 2 years ago.
   e) much less than 2 years ago.

Figure 1

In the 1977 survey, statistical differences were evident on two questions out of seven. REACH students were more likely to say that they liked school better than they had two years ago (Question 7). However, they also answered more frequently that they planned to leave school after one year or as soon as they were allowed to quit, while the comparison group tended to answer that they would attend school as long as they could (Question 4). By 1979, the two groups' responses to Question 4 no longer showed any statistical difference.

The 1979 survey indicated five areas in which REACH students had more positive attitudes than did the comparison group. REACH students were more positive in their general attitude towards school (Question 1), interest in school subjects (Question 2), feeling that school learning is useful (Question 3), attitude towards teachers (Question 5), and in attitude toward school (Question 7).

The researcher also compared the 1977 and 1979 responses of 50 students within the REACH project, 25 in each of grades 9 and 10. The comparison showed a significant difference in general attitude towards school (Question 1) and teachers (Question 5). These attitudes were more positive in 1979 than in 1977.

4. Work Experience Evaluation and Community Involvement

The work experience program included an extensive evaluation component. Students and employers filled out several questionnaires and the work experience co-ordinator interviewed the employers.

The work experience program was judged generally successful. The co-ordinator was able to locate many and varied work stations, communication and co-operation were good, students functioned adequately in their placements, and in some cases they were able to go directly into the working world from these placements. Summaries of employers' ratings in September 1978 and January 1979 appear in Figures 2 and 3.

Teachers reported success in co-operating and communicating with the community, a process which was vital to Project REACH. They thought, however, that a newsletter would have assisted in dispelling some misconceptions and negative attitudes which existed in the community.

WORK EXPERIENCE RATINGS

Results For 8 Grade 11 Students
September 1978

Project REACH

	Rating				
	Unsatis-factory	Below Average	Average	Above Average	N/A
OCCUPATIONAL KNOWLEDGE					
1) Previously learned skills are used in the work student did for employer.			4		4
2) Communication skills; ability in oral, written and mechanical techniques of communication.			5		3
MANIPULATIVE SKILLS					
1) Quality of work, ability to meet quality standards.		1	4	2	1
2) Quantity of work, output of satisfactory work.		2	3	2	1
3) Job know-how, appreciation of acquired skills and knowledge.			5	1	2
4) Proper use of tools and equipment.			5	1	2
5) Correct selection and care of materials and supplies.			5	2	1
PERSONAL AND SOCIAL QUALITIES					
1) Cooperation, ability to work together with people.			4	3	1
2) Self control, ability to control one's emotions.		1	2	4	1
3) Reaction to advice and constructive criticism.		1	2	3	2
4) Adaptability, capacity to adjust to new problems and changing situations.			6		2
5) Willingness to follow directions.		1	3	3	1
WORK QUALITIES AND HABITS					
1) Industry, personal application to work assigned, initiative.		2	1	4	1
2) Dependability, thorough completion of a job without supervision.		1	2	4	1
3) Ability to follow directions.		1	4	2	1
4) Safety habits, minimizing chances for accidents.			5	1	2
5) Punctuality, reporting for work punctually.		1	1	5	1
6) Attendance, reporting for work regularly.			2	5	1
SUMMATION					
1) Student's overall performance of job.		2	2	3	1
2) Student's overall preparation for job.			5	1	2

Figure 2

WORK EXPERIENCE RATINGS

Results For 8 Grade 11 Students
September 1978

Project REACH

	Rating				
	Unsatis-factory	Below Average	Average	Above Average	N/A
OCCUPATIONAL KNOWLEDGE					
1) Previously learned skills are used in the work student did for employer.		1	4		3
2) Communication skills; ability in oral, written and mechanical techniques of communication.	1		4	2	1
MANIPULATIVE SKILLS					
1) Quality of work, ability to meet quality standards.			6	2	
2) Quantity of work, output of satisfactory work.		1	5	2	
3) Job know-how, appreciation of acquired skills and knowledge.			4	4	
4) Proper use of tools and equipment.			4	2	2
5) Correct selection and care of materials and supplies.			3	4	1
PERSONAL AND SOCIAL QUALITIES					
1) Cooperation, ability to work together with people.	1		2	5	
2) Self control, ability to control one's emotions.	1	1	2	4	
3) Reaction to advice and constructive criticism.	2		2	4	
4) Adaptability, capacity to adjust to new problems and changing situations.	1		3	3	1
5) Willingness to follow directions.		1	2	5	
WORK QUALITIES AND HABITS					
1) Industry, personal application to work assigned, initiative.		2	3	3	
2) Dependability, thorough completion of a job without supervision.		2	2	4	
3) Ability to follow directions.		1	3	4	
4) Safety habits, minimizing chances for accidents.			2	5	1
5) Punctuality, reporting for work punctually.	3		1	4	
6) Attendance, reporting for work regularly.	2	1	1	4	
SUMMATION					
1) Student's overall performance of job.			4	4	
2) Student's overall preparation for job.		1	3	1	3

Figure 3

PROJECT EXPERIENCE

Rocky Mountain House School Division
1975-78

PROJECT EXPERIENCE
Rocky Mountain House School Division
1975-78

OVERVIEW

Project Experience was a three-year experiment in alternative schooling directed towards junior high school level students who had either dropped out or been expelled from school. These students had extremely negative attitudes towards school. The project, which operated out of a downtown location in Rocky Mountain House, attempted to change these students' attitudes and/or academic performances through a program combining work experience and special education and emphasizing individualized instruction in small groups.

BACKGROUND

The need for a special program in Rocky Mountain House became apparent when the local Alberta Social Services worker reported that out of a total school population of 3,100 for the area 18 young people between the ages 13 and 18 were not attending school. In response to this report, Mr. John Ronjom, Superintendent of Schools, sent a request for funding to Alberta Education, so that some type of schooling appropriate for these "disenchanted" young people could be provided. Learning Assistance Field Services (LAFS) personnel from the Red Deer Regional Office of Alberta Education became involved at this point and did diagnostic testing of potential students.

PROJECT DESIGN

1. Objectives

The primary objective of Project Experience was "to determine whether school dropouts or underachieving students with severe behavior problems could be assisted attitudinally and/or academically by an alternative program which differed markedly from the regular school program."

The objectives of the project were:

a) To prepare students for future employment and active participation as citizens.

b) To improve students' attitudes towards themselves, others, the world of work and education.

c) To obviate the need for social and economic assistance to these students in the future. (Most potential candidates for the project were unemployable and receiving various types of social assistance).

The project developers judged that students' achievement of the stated objectives could be judged in terms of the following types of growth:

a) Growth in personal responsibility--being on time, accepting criticism, holding a job;

b) Growth in interpersonal relationships and socially acceptable coping skills--co-operating with others, participation in group activities, avoiding hostile confrontation, abiding by rules and laws;

c) Growth in basic academic skills;

d) Growth in knowledge of basic life skills such as driving and completing forms; and

e) Growth in problem-solving and decision-making skills such as money management and dealing with personal problems.

2. Selection of Students

Criteria used in selecting students for the project were both objective and subjective. All selected students had to be between 13 and 18 years old, with preference given to those over 15 whenever possible. They had to have academic performance levels 1.5 years or more behind their potential level, as measured by comparing the results of a test of mental age with the results of the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT). That is, all students selected could be officially categorized as "learning disabled", a term which is applied to students in the normal range of intelligence who are grossly underachieving in some aspects of school work.

Selected students also had to have one or more of the following characteristics, as judged by at least two persons in referral agencies (teachers, school administrators, LAFS personnel, social workers, parents, probation officer, public health nurse):

a) Lack of ego sufficient to limit normal development in the classroom,

b) Continued disruptive behavior great enough to affect operation of normal school classroom,

c) Prolonged or repeated absence from school, refusal to attend school, or expulsion from school,

d) Lack of peer group association,

e) Low level of frustration.

Students in Project Experience were the "trouble makers," misfits and problem students who either did not want to go to school or behaved in such a way that the school could not accommodate them without infringing on the rights of other students. The final selection criterion was that the student must want to enter the program, often seeing it as a "last chance" for education.

3. Staff, Space and Facilities, Funding

Project Experience was originally designed to serve 10 to 12 students, but in actual practice as many as 20 students attended at certain times. The staff included:

a) One full-time teacher whose primary duty was to help and encourage students on an individual basis in the development of basic academic skills.

b) A half-time social worker whose primary duties were to co-ordinate the work experience program, work in co-operation with teachers and parents on the growth of students' personal and social skills, and access other necessary aid such as speech therapy or psychological counselling.

c) A full-time paraprofessional (teacher's aide) whose duties included tutoring, supervision, and clerical and administrative work.

The project center was a rented church hall in Rocky Mountain House which had washroom and lunch facilities. Instead of traditional classroom furnishings, the hall contained tables and chairs and small portable blackboards.

No laboratory or gymnasium facilities were available, but students had access to the community's swimming pool, arena and playgrounds. Special commercial materials, particularly language arts materials, were purchased for the project. The project also had full use of all audio-visual material and equipment available from the Rocky Mountain House School Division's instructional materials center.

The project was funded by the School Foundation Program, local revenue, and a $66,000 grant from the Planning and Research Branch of Alberta Education. In addition, Alberta Social Services and Community Health funded the half-time services of a social worker.

CURRICULUM

Project Experience had three curriculum components: remedial-academic studies, life skills, and work experience.

Before entering the program, students took a battery of tests which diagnosed individual academic skill levels in reading, spelling and mathematics. (Scores ranged from grade 3.5 to grade 7.0). The teacher and teacher's aide assigned work to each student at the appropriate levels and provided tutoring, counselling and encouragement.

The curriculum was limited to the "basics" (language arts, mathematics, social studies, and in some cases science) and life skills such as banking, insurance, getting information, typing, driving, individual rights and responsibilities, and government. One of the goals of the project was to prepare students to re-enter the regular school system at the grade 10 level. To assist in achievement of this goal, local secondary school teachers prepared lists of essential skills and concepts which students should have mastered before attempting grade 10 courses.

Although it was necessary and desirable to individualize a large portion of the academic work, the teacher made an effort to balance this activity with a certain amount of discussion, using both large and small groups. These discussions often focused on informal counselling and social development activities.

The social worker who co-ordinated the work experience program provided students with guidance regarding employment and careers, exposure to community resources, follow-up and encouragement. Students gained both practical work experience and experience in social skills such as meeting the public. Some students were not mature or responsible enough to benefit from work experience, but whenever possible students spent half of their school time at a job. They worked at automotive shops, gas stations, and grocery stores; in a day care center or kindergarten; at the local school board and town offices; in a greenhouse; and at two sawmills. In order to keep class sizes small, the social worker attempted to place one half of the students in morning jobs and the other half in afternoon jobs.

EVALUATION METHODS

Students were evaluated by means of tests administered at spaced intervals. These tests included a survey of attitudes towards elements of school, feelings about work, and self-concept; and the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT). General progress was also measured in terms of attendance, social behavior and job success. Job success was assessed by the employer, the teacher and the social worker.

Reports written by an Educational Consultant of the Regional Office of Alberta Education and by the Social Services and Community Health worker attached to the project provided further evaluation input.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

1. Selecting Students for the Project and Admission Procedures

A number of problems occurred in relation to selecting students for the project. Careful diagnostic procedures were employed, but the staff reported that even more information should have been provided. School, family and community background; work history; aptitudes and interests would have been useful information for choosing the most suitable students and working successfully with them in the project. However, even as they were initially conceived and without adding the above-mentioned information, the admittance procedures took up a great deal of staff time.

The greatest problem related to student selection was the need to avoid having Project Experience become a "dumping ground" for all students who caused problems for teachers, parents or case workers. Those responsible for selection had a difficult job. Often their judgements were necessarily subjective and hard to justify in any "scientific" way, and pressure to admit students who did not meet the criteria was sometimes very great.

2. Communication and Public Relations

Project Experience had difficulty communicating with prospective candidates because they were often difficult to locate, unreliable in keeping appointments and distrustful of official agencies. Another weakness, reported by the social worker, was inter-agency communication. More meetings should have been scheduled to provide for discussion among such groups as the school board and superintendent, feeder schools, Project Experience staff, Alberta Social Services and Community Health, and the local Public Health unit. There was also a need for greater communication between the project and such agencies as Manpower and the Apprenticeship Board, so that students could have more assistance with planning for future education and employment.

A major communication problem occurred in the area of public relations. Some members of the community did not understand the objectives of the project and found its surface appearance unacceptable. Project staff did not wish to communicate their objectives widely, through the media for example. They wished to maintain a low profile to protect the privacy of students and their families and keep to a minimum the negative effects of being "guinea pigs." Perhaps some appropriate compromise between these two needs could have been found.

3. Student Behavior

Many of the project's problems were a product of the type of student involved and were therefore unavoidable, but frustrating. Administrative procedures were hindered because students often registered and did not attend. Students often dropped out without informing the teacher or employer. (A 33 to 50% dropout rate prevailed throughout.) Many students who were initially enthusiastic about the project eventually began shirking their school work or their jobs, or both.

4. Academic Component and Staff Changes

At the end of the first year the teacher resigned and accepted a similar position elsewhere. With a new teacher, the emphasis shifted from remedial-academic work to work experience and counselling. This change in teaching approach was reflected in the academic test results; students were most successful in those areas emphasized by the teacher.

5. Work Experience Component

Finding work experience placements for students was extremely difficult, but persistent searching resulted in overall success. The jobs had to be ones in which students could succeed because a major objective of the project was to develop self-confidence. Also, the employers had to be satisfied enough with the services provided to continue participating in the program. There were few potential employers in the small town of Rocky Mountain House, and many employers wanted full-day employees, which the project could not provide because of its design.

A further problem occurred in that students under the age of 15 were often too immature to hold jobs; consequently, younger students did not fit into the project very well.

6. Counselling Services

Evaluators noted that a school counsellor was needed to deal intensively with personal problems, as staff members had only enough time to deal with academic, work and social problems.

EVALUATION RESULTS

Employers, teachers, social workers and others who were involved with Project Experience felt that the program was generally successful, especially since these students would not have attended school otherwise. The project succeeded in several ways.

a) Alienated students experienced a sense of belonging and camaraderie.

b) Students received support in the form of counselling and life skills training.

c) Some students received training for future employment.

d) Some students were able to continue their academic education after completing remedial work in this project.

e) A hard-core group of students who seemed to be drifting found that the project served as a stopover until they found something else.

The following statistical information also serves to evaluate the success of Project Experience.

1. Academic Results

Administration of the PIAT to students before they entered the project and at regularly spaced intervals provided a measure of academic progress. The results are limited, however, because the following variables could not be controlled: the number of students in the sample was very small; few students remained in the project for an extended period of time (21 students took both pretests and post-tests and remained in the program for periods of 2 to 36 months); and most importantly, the teaching approach changed in the second year when a new teacher was hired.

During 1975-76 the average overall rate of improvement, as measured by the PIAT total scores, was from 0.65 grades per year to 1.63 grades per year, a significant increase of 1.03 grades per year. Other significant increases in rate of improvement occurred in mathematics and general information. In mathematics the rate of progress increased by 2.01 grades per year (from 0.81 to 2.01) and in general information by 1.45 grades per year

(from 0.71 to 2.16). Because pretest and post-test scores were available for too few pupils (N = 13), the rates of improvement for reading comprehension (0.94 grades per year) and spelling (0.11) were not statistically significant.

In contrast, during the project's second year, 1976-77, there were no significant improvements in rates as measured by the various subtests of the PIAT. As noted elsewhere, this result reflects the non-academic emphasis of the second-year program.

During the third year, 1977-78, a greater academic emphasis was effected, particularly with respect to reading comprehension. The shift in emphasis was reflected in a very pronounced improvement in the average remediation rates for reading comprehension. For the five students who remained in the project for three years, and for whom pretest and post-test scores were available, the rate of improvement increased by 2.08 grades per year (from 0.68 to 2.76). In two other areas measured by the PIAT the number of students involved was too small to permit the substantial changes in rates to reach statistical significance: in reading recognition there was a gain of 0.88 grades per year, and in general information there was a loss of 1.06 grades per year.

Table 2 reports summary information of the results over all three years of the project. Data are tabulated on the basis of the PIAT total scores, which are measures of general achievement.

Pretest and post-test scores were available for 21 students who had spent varying amounts of time in the project. For this group, the baseline learning rate up to the start of the project was 0.64 grades per year. Project activities resulted in a rate of improvement of 0.99 grades per year, an increase of 0.34 grades. The test for statistical significance of correlated means revealed that the probability was too high that the difference may have been due to chance factors. Accordingly, the conclusion is that no significant average improvement occurred.

The analysis for each PIAT subtest, based on the 1975-78 progress for this same set of students, also produced non-significant results. The average rate of improvement for the 21 students ranged between 0.67 and 0.54 grades per year for aspects of reading. For this same group the rate of improvement in mathematics was 0.37 grades per year. For spelling and general information there was no increase in rate of progress; that is, the rates remained the same as they were at the start of the project.

Table 3 displays the average increase or loss (difference) in learning rate for each year of the project and the overall increase or loss in rate for general achievement (as reflected by PIAT total scores). It is apparent that teaching emphasis is crucial as evidenced by the loss in learning rate in Year 2, when remedial work in basic academics was de-emphasized.

Table 2 displays the results for 21 students for the total period of time they were in Project Experience.

Table 2

1975-78 GENERAL ACHIEVEMENT: AVERAGE BASELINE (PRE-PROJECT), REMEDIATION AND IMPROVEMENT (DIFFERENCE) RATES IN GRADE EQUIVALENTS PER YEAR

			PIAT Total Test Score: Average Grade Equivalents					
Student Code	Period in Program	Years in Program	Pretest (# of Years in School)	Post-Test	Difference in Scores	Remedial Rate Per Year	Baseline Rate (Previous) Learning in Grade Equiv.)	Improvement or Loss Difference
Student 1	6/76-6/78	2.0	7.7 (11)	10.6	2.9	1.45	.69	0.76
Student 2	6/76-6/78	2.0	3.6 (9)	4.8	1.2	0.60	0.39	0.21
Student 11	6/75-6/76	1.0	5.1 (12)	6.0	0.9	0.90	0.42	0.48
Student 12	1/76-1/77	1.0	11.2 (10)	8.0	-3.2	-3.20	1.11	-4.31
Student 3	6/75-6/77	2.0	6.0 (8)	8.0	2.0	1.00	0.75	0.25
Student 13	4/76-6/76	0.2	6.0 (9)	6.3	0.3	1.50	0.66	1.14
Student 4	1/77-6/77	0.5	6.6 (10)	6.8	0.2	0.40	0.65	-0.25
Student 14	7/75-6/76	1.0	3.1 (9)	3.9	0.8	0.80	0.34	0.46
Student 15	6/75-6/77	2.0	5.8 (11)	11.8	6.0	3.00	0.51	2.49
Student 16	9/75-6/76	0.9	7.4 (10)	9.9	2.5	2.78	0.73	2.05
Student 17	6/75-2/77	1.8	7.7 (10)	8.7	1.0	0.56	0.76	-0.20
Student 18	5/76-6/78	2.1	8.7 (12)	9.6	0.9	0.43	0.71	-0.28
Student 19	1/76-6/77	1.5	8.4 (9)	12.1	3.7	2.47	0.92	1.55
Student 5	1/76-1/77	1.0	10.6 (12)	10.0	-0.6	-0.6	0.87	-1.47
Student 20	6/75-6/76	1.0	5.1 (10)	6.8	1.7	1.71	0.51	1.20
Student 6	9/76-6/78	1.9	7.1 (10)	9.4	2.3	1.21	0.71	0.50
Student 7	11/76-6/78	1.7	5.3 (10)	7.4	1.9	1.12	0.52	0.60
Student 21	7/75-6/76	1.0	5.6 (8)	7.4	1.8	1.80	0.69	1.11
Student 8	10/75-1/77	1.3	5.0 (10)	4.8	-0.2	-0.15	0.50	-0.65
Student 9	6/75-6/78	3.0	5.8 (13)	8.4	2.6	0.87	0.43	0.44
Student 10	1/77-6/77	0.5	4.5 (9)	5.6	1.1	2.20	0.49	1.71
Averages for the group		16.19	6.49 (10.1)	7.92	1.42	0.99	0.64	+0.34*
Standard deviation		2.06	2.06	2.28	1.79	1.32	0.19	1.43

* Not significant at < .05 level.

Table 3

COMPARISON OF AVERAGE LEARNING RATES IN GENERAL ACHIEVEMENT: GRADE EQUIVALENTS PER YEAR

	Average Rates Based on PIAT Total Test Scores			
	Year 1 (N = 13)	Year 2 (N = 10)	Year 3 (N = 5)	Overall (N = 21)
Baseline	0.65	0.60	0.55	0.64
Remedial	1.68	0.35	1.16	0.99
Difference	1.03	-0.24	0.61	0.34

2. Student Attitude Survey

Evaluators prepared a student attitude survey containing semantic differential scales (ratings on a 5-point scale) on various aspects of self-concept, school and work. A comparison group, made up of 244 pupils in grades 9 and 10, was also tested. To provide a baseline, half of each group (project students and comparison group) responded to a Retrospective Attitude Survey Questionnaire, which asked for recollection of attitudes held in the previous year. The Retrospective Survey was required because no pretesting of attitudes had been done.

When the surveys were administered in January 1976, significant shifts in attitude appeared in only two areas. On a question which measured changes in Real Self-Concept (What I am really like as a student), Reflected Self-Concept (What other people think of me as a student), and Ideal Self-Concept (What I want to be like as a student), Project Experience pupils showed a substantial, statistically significant shift in attitude about "Real Self," while no change was indicated in the comparison group.

Secondly, Project Experience students showed dramatic shifts toward more positive attitudes about school and teachers, whereas there was no significant change in the comparison group.

A second attitude survey was conducted in June 1976, at which point students had spent up to 8 months in work experience programs. Perhaps because of time spent at work stations, Project Experience students' attitudes about jobs were more positive than they had been on the previous test. More positive attitudes were evident on these items: "What I think about my bosses," "What I think my chances are of getting the job I want," and "What I think my chances are of holding a job."

3. Work Experience

Employers judged work experience students on the basis of punctuality and attendence, responsibility and capability, politeness and tidiness, and

attitude. The social worker judged students in terms of social skills, responsibility, and attitude. During the first year, 70 percent of the students were reported successful at work experience. During subsequent years, despite problems, the work experience component was generally successful.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions and recommendations arise out of the successes and failures of Projects REACH and Experience. They may be useful to school systems contemplating the implementation of off-campus, alternative schooling for students who are not succeeding in the regular secondary school program.

1. Planning

Careful and thorough planning is essential, even though plans often change as unanticipated situations develop. Well in advance of the implementation date, an alternative schooling project should have set down its objectives and rationale, how students will be selected, standards for staffing and facilities, evaluation procedures, curriculum and materials, communication and public relations programs, and administrative systems.

2. Program Focus

Both of these projects had three program components--remedial-academic, social and life skills, and work experience or pre-employment education. Both found that emphasis on one aspect or another seemed to occur haphazardly, according to the orientation of the teacher hired, the facilities or services available, or some other uncontrolled factor. Instead, developers of such projects might deliberately choose to emphasize one aspect and design the program accordingly. Such an approach would provide for greater success in a number of areas. For example, choice of students, choice of staff, and choice of facilities should be directly related to program emphasis.

3. Selection of Students

The criteria for selecting students must be clearly related to the design of the program and clearly defined. Otherwise, the alternative schooling project could succumb to the inevitable pressure to become a "dumping ground" for all problem students.

Secondly, every effort should be made to obtain as much data and background information as possible about potential candidates, both to assist in making the best choices and to aid staff members in working with the students at a later date.

4. Selection of Staff Members

Ideally, the teacher should be matched to the objectives of the project and to the type of students. The teacher, who is a key figure in any school program, will tend to alter the program, consciously or unconsciously, to fit his or her personal teaching style and interests.

5. Support System

An alternative schooling project which is directed at remediating students who have been unsuccessful in the regular program and which uses individual activities and intensive counselling is a highly ambitious undertaking. Project developers should therefore ensure that they have available the necessary staff (suitable teachers, aides, social workers, counsellors, testing specialists, administrators), materials (individualized programs, study units, library books audio-visual equipment and materials), and facilities (safe and adequate space, laboratories, gymnasiums).

6. Off-Campus Location Versus School Facilities

Both projects reported that students benefitted attitudinally from the off-campus location. These students were unsuccessful at school and therefore disliked it, and the alternative program was more adaptable to their needs. They therefore developed more positive attitudes towards school and work, and their self-concepts improved. The small, cohesive group gave the students an opportunity to develop social skills in a sheltered situation, and their separation from the regular school removed the stigma of being "dumb."

On the other hand, the off-campus site meant the loss of facilities and services normally provided by the school, such as library, gymnasium and laboratories. This separation also caused problems with reintegrating those students who wished to return to the regular school system after leaving the special programs. Both projects made an effort to counteract these drawbacks, and staff members maintained that the separate location had many advantages.

Project developers would have to carefully weigh the pros and cons before choosing to set up a "storefront" school.

7. Communication and Public Relations

Communication methods should be planned in detail and constantly monitored. Community understanding and co-operation is essential for the success of a work experience program, and the unusual format of a storefront school is certain to attract attention and excite curiosity. When several agencies are involved, as they are in such projects, communication breakdown can be disastrous.

8. Evaluation

Evaluation procedures are necessary in all educational programs. But they are even more important when the approach is experimental and instruction is based on individual diagnosis and remediation. For example, the use of more comparison group data would have been desirable. Similarly, post-testing of all students who left the projects would have provided more data. Project developers should consider seeking assistance from experts in the field of evaluation.

9. Follow-Up Procedures

When students are taken out of the regular school program, some thought must be given to where they will go after the special project is over. Both of these projects did not provide sufficient training to enter the work force, and therefore a liaison with the regular high school program and other training agencies, such as the Apprenticeship Board, was vital.